How to be Nobody:
Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren* and Schizonomadism

Research Thesis

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by

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Introduction:
Genre and Periodization

In 1975, Samuel R. Delany's novel *Dhalgren* was published after several years of development and composition. It was released to mixed reception in the science fiction (hereafter referred to as SF) community but obtained measured success in a wider fiction audience.[1] Despite the initially cool reception, the novel became a minor cult classic and underwent reprints by several publishers. The 1996 Wesleyan and 2001 Vintage editions of the book contain novelist William Gibson's introduction entitled "The Recombinant City," in which he describes *Dhalgren* as a "literary singularity" and a "confirm[ation]" of not only the precarity and uncertainty of the 1960s, but also of a sense of possibility and awakening which characterized the period.[2] Gibson provides an impressionistic remembrance of the 1960s, the period which produced the novel, and locates within the decade the emergence of a new cultural and geographical phenomenon. He describes this phenomenon as a city which is invisible but which might be anywhere in the advanced industrial world. A character in the novel, a poet named Ernest Newboy, echoes this description in his thoughts on Bellona, the novel's setting, saying that sometimes the "streets seem to underpin all the capitals of the world [and other times] the whole place seems a pointless and ugly mistake."[3] Both Gibson and Newboy are highlighting a central aspect of the 1960s, namely the countercultural and urban conflict which characterized the decade.

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[1] Douglas Barbour, *Worlds Out of Words* (UK: The Hunting Raven Press, 1979); Samuel R. Delany "The Semiology of Silence: The *Science Fiction Studies* Interview," in *Silent Interviews: On Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some Comics* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

[2] William Gibson, introduction to *Dhalgren* by Samuel R. Delany (New York, NY: Vintage, 2001), xi-xiii.

[3] Samuel R. Delany, *Dhalgren*, 354.

Although Gibson is somewhat oblique in his description of the 1960s, Delany himself is more explicit in connecting the decade's strife to the composition and content of *Dhalgren*.[4] The novel is exemplary of the counterculture and urban decay of the 1960s without being a mere reflection of these characteristics, and instead offers an opportunity to reconsider not only that decade but also the history of the decades following World War II. The novel's plot alone merits it the descriptor of "difficult" and attempting to connect it to the larger domains of genre and historical period only adds to this. This introductory essay will unpack some of these difficulties of genre and periodization: genre is a particularly difficult issue and will be discussed in a greater amount of detail and although periodization is certainly as important, it will be conducted in somewhat broader terms. I will first provide a brief plot overview of the novel and then discuss the issues of genre and period.

Dhalgren's plot follows, and is in parts narrated by, an amnesiac-schizophrenic known as Kid. He is a drifter and college drop-out, and has arrived in the fictional city of Bellona without memory of his name or identity. Bellona, a city somewhere in the midwest, has been rocked by an unidentified catastrophe which has left much of the city without power and which has disrupted all pre-existing social relations. Kid works briefly as a laborer for the Richards family, who exemplify the white bourgeois nuclear family. Kid subsequently becomes renowned as a talented poet who is able to express, in an unprecedented manner, the chaotic experience of daily life in Bellona. He also becomes a leader of a nest of Scorpions, a gang similar to the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club, who are in almost every way the complete opposite of the Richards. The novel ends with Kid's recovery of his name, a cataclysmic event in the form of a riot, and Kid's depar-

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[4] Delany, "Semiology of Silence," 37.

ture from Bellona. These three concluding elements are to be understood solely as formally linked, a function of the novel's structure, rather than as a causal sequence.

A brief discussion of the novel's form is also necessary, as it is an experimental composition and therefore often poses problems for a linear reading. The novel's opening and closing lines are sentence fragments which can be read together as a coherent statement, and a statement made by Kid roughly halfway through the novel declares that the narrative "tape" has flipped such that instead of simply forming an ellipsis or a circle, the novel's narrative should instead be seen as a Möbius strip.[5] For much of the novel the narration is limited third person with pieces of Kid's first person narration interspersed, but the final chapter of the novel is narrated solely from Kid's point of view. Given the emphasis on Kid's unstable mental state, the narrative shifts further mitigate the reliability of the narrative and leave the reader to do a considerable amount of guess-work and assembly in constructing a coherent plot-line. Unreliability is further established by the intentional omission of key plot-points such as the explanation of the city's crisis, Kid's name as well as his poetry, and details that would link disjointed episodes of the story. The non-linearity of plot and complexity of narrative form conspire to make Bellona a schizophrenia-intensifying labyrinth of "halls of vapor and light" for Kid and *Dhalgren* a paranoia-inducing novel for the reader.[6]

Aside from the content and form of the novel, the placement of *Dhalgren* within a literary genre is also highly problematic in that the novel defies being labelled simply as SF or high liter-

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[5] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 1, 388, 801. Kid's statement, regarding the 'tape,' reads: "The whole tape of reality which he had been following had somehow overturned […] Everything left was now right."

[6] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 801; For a discussion of paranoia in *Dhalgren* see W. Gilbert Adair, *The American Epic Novel in the Late Twentieth Century: The Super-Genre of the Imperial State* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2008), 187.

ature. Delany's body of work from the 1960s can be located within the New Wave of SF, which can be characterized by its frank and fantastical representations of "sex, violence, and strong language [all of which are] dwarfed by a newly contentious politics." The New Wave, much like the 1960s counterculture, was wary of narratives of progress and affluence and diverged from earlier SF in that it engaged in significant critiques of these narratives.[7] Besides a shift in content and politics, the New Wave also inaugurated "science fiction's breakthrough to modernist poetics" in that New Wave authors appropriated the experimental narrative techniques devised by modernist authors decades earlier.[8] *Dhalgren* can thus be located squarely within the New Wave movement of SF insofar as it displays a critical attitude towards such narratives of progress or propriety as the bourgeois nuclear family, the image of the city as the engine of civilization, and even of the value of art itself. Furthermore the novel is highly experimental in form, as it deploys an unreliable narrator, narrative nonlinearity, an *in media res* beginning, and an inconclusive ending.

These formal innovations are just some of those developed by the modernist authors in the early twentieth century, and would therefore seem to situate *Dhalgren* within the modernist genre.[9] Brian McHale, however, delineates modernist and postmodernist fiction not on the basis of their formal elements but instead on the emphasis which they give to epistemology and ontology, respectively. Modernist authors, that is, emphasize ways of knowing and perceiving whereas postmodernists instead emphasize modes of being or experiencing the world. McHale himself

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[7] Darren Harris-Fain, "Dangerous Visions: New Wave and Post-New Wave Science Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Science Fiction*, ed. Eric Carl Link and Gerry Canavan (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 34-37.

[8] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York, NY: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1987), 68-71.

[9] Stephen Kern, *The Modernist Novel: A Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 2.

characterizes *Dhalgren* as postmodernist rather than modernist on this basis, insofar as epistemological uncertainty in the novel is a function of the Bellona's instability rather than as a function of the characters' perspectives.[10]

The delineation between modernist and postmodernist, as well as SF or high literature, is often opaque or seemingly arbitrary and a novel like *Dhalgren* highlights this issue. One reading of the novel, for example, could characterize it as modernist based on Kid's unreliability without considering Bellona's instability; conversely another reading, such as McHale's and my own, would instead characterize *Dhalgren* as postmodernist based precisely on Bellona's instability. Similarly the novel could be characterized as SF based on criteria external to the novel's content such as Delany's prior publishing history; however, the designation of SF is problematized by internal criteria such as the novel's plot and minimal use of traditional SF imagery. *Dhalgren's* characterization as high literature could easily be justified by the beauty of the prose as well as the novel's attendance to the serious issues of art, desire, and death, the staple elements of what is often considered canonical literature. The difficulty of placing *Dhalgren* within a genre is clear in that its initial reception in the SF community was relatively lukewarm and in the decades since its publication the novel has not been treated as a work of high literature but instead as a work of SF. Following from the difficulty of easily applying genre-descriptors outlined here, it is perhaps best to place *Dhalgren* within the mixed genre of "New Wave SF Postmodernist Literature." Although this classification seems to combine the best of all worlds, it still risks reducing the novel to a discrete category which it ultimately exceeds or diverges from.

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[10] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, 7, 10, 71.

To add perhaps more confusion to the mix, it is necessary to define the "postmodern" in its most general terms, besides its literary usage. World War II serves best as the starting point of the postmodern period, while an ending point is essentially impossible to assign due to debates regarding whether or not the postmodern period is still ongoing or has ended. World War II serves best as the starting point because the horrors of the Nazi death camps as well as the US deployment of two atomic bombs effectively revealed the danger of an uncritical attitude towards the notion of scientific progress, which had at least since the Industrial Revolution served as one of the central narratives of Western civilization. It is in part for this reason that Jean-François Lyotard defines the postmodern condition as "incredulity towards metanarratives," where meta-narrative refers to the principles which are assumed to ground truth and meaning.[11] In this sense, the Holocaust and atomic weaponry alienated much of Western civilization from a narrative in which technology served solely as the means toward human progress.

The metanarratives that the 1960s counterculture were particularly incredulous towards are those of capitalism and democracy as systems of affluence and inclusion.[12] Inspired by Marcuse, the counterculture furthermore refused the putative "society without opposition" in which technological management and the supremacy of rationalism have removed the need or desire for protest and critical thought.[13] Combined with the geopolitical precarity of the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation, the economic and political alienation of the youth coalesced into a

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[11] Jean-François Lyotard, introduction to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii-xxiv.

[12] Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 18-20, 44.

[13] Herbert Marcuse, introduction to *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1964) xli, xliv.

counterculture founded on creative expression and experiences beyond the scope of technocratic rationality.[14] In *Dhalgren,* these aspects of the counterculture appear in the poetic endeavors of Kid as well as the radically unstable nature of his experience in defiance of rational explanation. Furthermore, many of the characters resemble the full mainstream and countercultural cast of the decade: hippies; bikers; civil rights and black power activists; queer and gender-nonconforming individuals; the poor and often black residents of burned-out inner cities; the out of touch and often neurotic white bourgeoisie; and the power-hungry political and cultural elite.

Although these figures appear in the novel, they are not all depicted in equal detail nor are they necessarily portrayed as being at each others' throats. Rather than being in stark opposition to one another, characters from across these various social groups are portrayed as forming alliances to survive in the post-apocalyptic wasteland of Bellona. Aside from social interaction contoured by need, i.e. resource-sharing, there are the contingent encounters which arise from an urban existence: Bellona's sole operating bar, primarily a gay bar, is the social hub of the city's popular classes. The city's elite are conversely centered around the figure of Calkins, who manages the city's newspaper and harbors aspirations of becoming the city's governor. Besides this cadre of elites, the white bourgeoisie is portrayed in the Richards family: a family who refuses to face the music of the apocalypse that surrounds them, and holds on to the genteel lifestyle of the middle class. Most absent from the narratives are the black and poor residents of Bellona's ghetto, Jackson. The most sustained scene featuring people of color where race is foregrounded is in the context of a church meeting led by the fiery Reverend Taylor or in the jarring and near-in-

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[14] Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on Technocratic Society and Youthful Opposition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969), 1, 5, 39, 240.

comprehensible narrative of a riot near the end of the novel. Although Kid is a biracial man of white and Native American ancestry, his race is only foregrounded in dialogue a couple of times; similarly, race as a focal topic of conversation occurs somewhat sparingly for a novel of 800 pages. In a sense, the relative silence of Bellona's poor black population mirrors the invisibility of their real-world counterparts in histories of the 1960s which emphasize the less threatening narratives of flower power or free love and omit the historical realities of racialized violence and oppression.

Dating the postmodern period and postmodernist practices' inception to World War II poses a further challenge to these sanitized histories if one considers the critique raised by African-American theorists Cornel West and bell hooks, who although in slightly different terms both argue that the contemporary postmodern condition is a generalized version of the specifically historical and ongoing experience of enslavement, oppression, and precarity of the black community within the white-hegemonic US.[15] This critique is important in considering Delany, a black author, and the periodization of his work as postmodern. In terms of mere dating this is a seemingly innocuous periodization, however it runs the risk of ascribing a characteristic to Delany which could be external to his personal and familial history as a black man within a white-dominated society.[16] In addition to the historical conditions of alienation and oppression in the African-American community, black fictional practices also prefigured general postmodern and New Wave works. Afrofuturism, a genre dating to the enslavement of Africans in the Americas,

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[15] Anders Stephanson and Cornel West, "Interview with Cornel West," *Social Text*, No. 21, Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism (1989): 276-78.; bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness." *In Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1999), 23-31.

[16] Madelyn Joblon, *Black Metafiction: Self-Consciousness in African American Literature* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 1, 169.

refers to a set of narratives and tropes which posit the figure of the "black genius" as a corrective to centuries of abuse and violence at the hands of white society; and although it places great value on a notion of correction or progress, Afrofuturism is cautiously ambivalent towards the notion of a guaranteed future.[17] Delany, and his body of work as a whole, can readily be characterized as Afrofuturist based on the preceding definition. In my reading, however, *Dhalgren* is much more a work which explicitly foregrounds mental and ontological instability than racial narratives of progress or injustice.[18]

Dhalgren thus poses challenges for the reader on several fronts. The narrative's content and form are highly nonlinear and experimentally constructed, and rely on postmodernist techniques to thwart attempts at a straightforward reading. The book furthermore defies easy genre characterization either as high literature or mere science fiction as it contains elements of both; additionally, Delany's status as a black man problematizes genre or periodizing arguments which privilege white hegemony in cultural production. This introduction has sought to contextualize *Dhalgren* within the postmodern period but also as a product of the 1960s counterculture more specifically. In the following sections, I turn instead to the text itself and read the novel through the theoretical works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their volumes *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. In the first section of the thesis, I consider the three social formations set

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[17] Lisa Yaszek, "Afrofuturism in American Science Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to American Science Fiction*, ed. Eric Carl Link and Gerry Canavan (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 62-3.

[18] The novel does contain discussions explicitly discussing and problematizing issues of race. My argument emphasizing mental-ontological instability rather than these discussions is justified by the fact that the novel is ultimately about Kid. His concerns are more primarily with mental and experiential issues, although some discussion of his mixed heritage does occur. Those who characterize the novel itself as Afrofuturist do so based on Delany's own race, rather than the infrequent degree to which the novel's characters themselves explicitly foreground the issue of race. Future research in this project will seek to more fully engage with Delany's treatment of race, gender, and sexuality in *Dhalgren*.

forth in *Anti-Oedipus* and the types of meaning which correspond to these formations. I argue that *Dhalgren*, through the poetry of Kid, rejects capitalist abstraction and decoding and instead valorizes a system of expression founded on concrete and co-present relations between signs and their objects. In the second section, I consider *Dhalgren* as a work of literary alchemy in which the novel's missing pieces of information function as "alkahests" or elements which would dissolve narrative tension if they were introduced into the narrative. Although the two sections of my thesis diverge in their theoretical sources and their strategies of reading the novel, they are unified by an attempt to comprehend a novel which seems to revel in thwarting such an endeavor. In my conclusion I outline a concept of "schizonomadism," and although that section serves as the summation of my argument it may be informative to read it prior to sections one and two.

Rediscovering Savagery:
Meaning and Expression in *Dhalgren*

Although Bellona is lacking a commodities market or any other functioning characteristic of a capitalist economy, the city and its social arrangements must still be understood as occurring within the larger context of a capitalist society. This is mainly demonstrated in Kid's relationship as a laborer with the Richards family as well as by their own internal dynamic, which is illustrative of the Oedipal nuclear family within capitalism. In Kid's interactions with the family, the decoding of money as a meaningless object is at work. The Richards, in relation to themselves, are emblematic of Deleuze and Guattari's characterization of capitalism's cynicism and piety. Though Deleuze and Guattari frame these concepts in terms of a cultural logic, at their base they refer simply to an awareness of a thing's inauthenticity while maintaining it as a reason or motivation for doing something.[19] The Richards note, on several occasions, the artificiality of their motivations and familial configuration but continue to perform it in spite of their acknowledgment of its illusory nature. Considering the Oedipal structure of the Richards family is also instructive in that it enables us to explain Kid's apparent schizophrenia as a function of his own family history and life prior to entering Bellona.

Kid's introduction to the Richards comes by way of Madame Brown, a former hospital worker and Bellona's sole psychotherapist. Madame Brown explains that the Richards are a typical family, though a little odd: "Mrs. Richards gets easily upset by… anything strange. Mr. Richards perhaps goes a little too far in trying to protect her." Madame Brown tells Kid that, for

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[19] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 225.

helping the Richards move their belongings from one apartment to another, he will be paid "five dollars an hour, and those aren't the sort of wages you can sneeze at in Bellona."[20] Here, Madame Brown seems to indicate that Bellona is still a society operating on the exchange of money for goods and services, though the lack of monetary transactions throughout the novel reveal her belief in its use to be misguided. The first indication of money's meaninglessness occurs at the end of Kid's first day of labor for the Richards. Having left their apartment and headed to Teddy's, the city's only bar, he attempts to pay for his drink with the day's wages. It comes as a surprise when, offering a bill to the bartender, he is told: "Put it away, kid […] What kind of place do you think this is, anyway?"[21] A similar event occurs much later in the novel when Kid encounters a character named Jack, an Army deserter, at the bar. Jack appears to be in a daze and repeatedly mentions his inability to pay for a drink, as well as his dejection at being unable to do so. Kid, realizing Jack's inability to comprehend the city's lack of exchange economy, takes a bill out of his own pocket and offers it to Jack so that the man will feel as if he rightfully deserves the beer it will buy him. Jack is transfixed in a naive or unaware piety, in which he cannot see the falseness of his belief in the power of money. This unaware piety must be counterposed to the self-aware piety expressed by the Richards family.

In Kid's relationship to the Richards, the event most directly related to the preceding comments regarding money is the scene in which Kid returns to the Richards' apartment to collect his final pay. Arriving in the midst of one of the family's regular dinner parties, Kid has to repeatedly ask Mr. Richards before the man acknowledges his request to be paid. Rather than

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[20] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 113.

[21] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 157.

settle up, Mr. Richards instead mocks Kid's request, saying "Five dollars an hour? You *must* be crazy! What does somebody like you need that money for, anyway? It doesn't cost anything to live in this city […] Money doesn't mean anything here anymore[…] I've got to hold on to what I have. I can't spend that kind of money now, with everything like this."[22] Here Mr. Richards expresses the cynical disbelief accompanied by pious reliance on cultural form or artifact which characterizes capitalist society: he admits the meaninglessness of money, but explains that regardless he must save what monetary wealth his still possesses.

Aside from Mr. Richards' remarks concerning money, both he and Mrs. Richards make comments in other sections of the novel which reveal their cynical awareness of their Oedipal conditioning, an awareness which is accompanied by a pious continuation of Oedipal roles rather than a modification of behavior. Mr. Richards is the first to express these feelings, in a conversation with Kid early in his employment by the family. Referring to Mrs. Richards' efforts to maintain the veneer of Oedipal or hetero-domesticity within their home he says, "Do you know, in here, in this house, I almost have the feeling that none of it's real? Or just a very thin shell […] the less I believe in it, the more it slips."[23] Despite the fact that he places most of the blame on Mrs. Richards, Mr. Richards himself is equally as responsible for maintaining the illusion insofar as he still goes to his office at a Maitland Systems Engineering despite having admitted that he is not being paid and from which we can assume he isn't actually working on any projects. Mrs. Richards, speaking to Kid after the death of her younger son Bobby, echoes her husband's sentiments almost exactly. Of her husband's employment and habit of going to the office, she says,

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[22] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 276.

[23] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 174.

"Do you know, I don't believe all that out there is real […] I don't believe there's anyplace to go […] The only thing I can do for him is to try and keep a good home, where nothing can hurt him, at least here, a happy, safe [home]."[24] Whereas Mr. Richards locates falseness in the home, Mrs. Richards instead locates it in the outside world, which she sees as utterly inhospitable and unsafe.

Of the Richards, it is perhaps the older son Eddy who most explicitly critiques the nuclear family. When June, the middle Richards child, comes to visit him he explains that his refusal to return home is due to his newfound affinity with the Scorpions. Rather than a stultifying and oppressive environment, as would be found in the family home, the Scorpion nest instead encourages a sense of togetherness and mutual responsibility. Though this characterization may sound like the sense of duty found in the family, it is important to note that the Scorpions' social dynamic is without the structuring principle of Oedipus: in fact, the Scorpions are at almost every point the inversion of the Oedipal nuclear family. They are pack-like, rather than privately individual; their desires and relationships are in many cases queer and polyamorous, rather than heterosexual and monogamous; rather than a worship at the city's church or become initiates at the Monastery, the Scorpions instead seem to embody a totemist or animist tribe; and though Kid occupies the position of leader of the tribe, the group is remarkably anti-hierarchical, as opposed to the powerful position of the father within nuclear families. As a whole, the Scorpion-nest is more an anti-Oedipal social arrangement than it is a distorted version of the Oedipal nuclear family. The power of Oedipal socialization is evidenced, however, in that Eddy does describe the community of Scorpions as being family-like. Regardless of whether he does this to make the

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[24] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 244-6.

subject understandable to his sister June, who still lives in such an arrangement, or does in fact believe this, the comparison to a family speaks to the power of the nuclear family as a concept.[25]

Having considered the cynicism proper to capitalist economy and its investment in the Oedipal nuclear family, we should now consider the ways in which Kid's psyche is indicative of one which has slipped somewhat from its Oedipal structuring. The concepts most relevant in doing so are the conjunctive synthesis of consumption-consummation, whereby the subject is produced, and the corresponding Oedipal paralogism of the double-bind, which reduces subject formation and identification to the Oedipalized figures of the father or mother. Before turning to the conjunctive synthesis, it is worthwhile to summarize the preceding two syntheses. The first in the series is the connective synthesis of production which links partial objects, thereby constituting a "flow-producing machine."[26] Whereas schizoanalysis posits partial objects as detachable conduits in a non-personal productive flow, Oedipus instead situates partial objects as relays of lack which is distributed by the master-signifier of the phallus.[27] The second in the series, the disjunctive synthesis of recording, which in its free or schizoanalytical use refers to an inclusive disjunction of "either…or…or…," in identity formation as opposed to its Oedipal formulation as a double bind which instead expresses the disjunction as an exclusive "either/or." In terms of identity formation, the double bind is manifested as the compulsory identification solely with the

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[25] Delany, *Dhalgren* 566-70.

[26] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 5-6; Eugene Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 26.

[27] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 71-3

parental figures as a frame of reference, rather than someone who lies outside the Oedipal triangle.[28]

The third and final synthesis, the conjunctive synthesis of consumption-consummation is the point at which the subject recognizes himself in the productive sequence and realizes "[The subject-producer] is me, and so [the product] mine." Deleuze and Guattari explain that the error of this realization is that it splits the producer and product into discrete entities whereas in fact the subject-producer is itself just as much a product in desiring-production as the object which he desires.[29] As we have seen, the problem posed by Oedipus is that it restricts identification as a process and realization to the fixed-triangulated positions of mommy-daddy-me. Kid stands as a subversion of this identification process insofar as he can not recall the names of his parents or the name they assigned him. He reflects: "I had a mother, I had a father. Now I don't remember their names. I don't remember mine. In another room, two people [his lovers Lanya and Denny] are sleeping who are nearer to me by how many years and thousands of miles; for whom, in this terrifying light, I would almost admit love."[30] This passage speaks to Kid's dis-identification from his Oedipal family and the triangulated identity which it would impose on him, and points instead to his interactions with his current lovers and the home that they have made within Bellona. In addition to his subversion of the Oedipal imposition of identity, Kid also expresses the schizo's constitution through simulation, whereby "he is something only by being something

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[28] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 75-6, 79-82.

[29] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus,* 5, 16-8.

[30] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 420.

else."[31] That is, his identity within Bellona as Kid is constituted on the basis of his having forgotten his Oedipal identity.

As soon as he does recall his birth-name, an event which occurs near the end of the novel, the riot which closes the novel occurs and the story is complete. Kid's narration of the riot is far more disjointed than that of other events and for this reason an attempt to summarize the event is problematic. Kid describes the riotous cataclysm as a moment of terror in which many of Bellona's residents flee the city. One terrified woman blames the riot on George Harrison, a black man accused of raping June Richards, but this explanation is not sufficiently corroborated as to justify its conclusiveness in explaining the novel's sudden end. Kid's describes the cataclysm in terms of its meteorological aspects, such as the intense cloudiness and lightning which characterize Bellona. The relationship between Kid's realization of his name and the catastrophe is not causal, it is instead a coincidence that their occurrence is so close within the narrative. The novel is concerned with Kid's quest for his name and therefore its revelation signals the end of the story.

Although capitalism operates on a principle of decoding and recoding of flows and is characterized by its dual cynicism-piety, it is preceded by a paranoid despotism which operates by overcoding flows. Despotism is grounded in the birth of imperial power, which subjugates territories to its rule and institutes money as a means of extracting taxes.[32] Taxation via money is exemplary of the abstraction proper to despotism, and determines the condition of writing under this regime. Whereas capitalism is defined by a "death of writing" in which the written word is

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[31] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 87.

[32] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 196-7.

not used to convey meaning and is instead used to express instructions as in a technical diagram, and whereas savagery is defined as regime of cruelty which only fixes speech to writing in the context of ritual, despotism is characterized by a system of terror in which inscription is used to deliver the absent speech of the despot in written form.[33]

Overcoding is most simply defined as the overlay of a despotic or imperial code over a preexisting savage or territorial one.[34] Overcoding in the context of Bellona is exemplified in the progression of time and its experience by residents of the city. Most explicitly, there is a tension between Lanya's experience of time, which relies on an assumption of its measurability and linearity, and Kid's experience of time, which instead proceeds without necessarily measuring the passage of time and which seems multilinear or circular. This is best exemplified in the scene of the two lovers' reunion following a period apart. This absence from one another takes up almost the entirety of the novel's fourth chapter and by Lanya's account spans five days. Kid, however, insists that the separation had only lasted an afternoon. It is crucial to note that Lanya's measurement of the time is based on the passage of day and night, as it would be impossible to ground this measurement in calendar dates: ever since the city's catastrophe, dates have been indeterminate and only alluded to in the city newspaper's masthead. However rather than include dates in the linear progression which we are used to, the dates are instead scrambled and jump across days, months, and centuries in what one character refers to as the publisher Calkins' "little joke."[35] As with Mr. Richards cynical awareness of the meaninglessness of money, it appears that

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[33] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 189, 205, 240.

[34] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 195-7.

[35] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 26, 363-8.

Calkins too is aware of the contrived nature of linear dating and expresses this through his haphazard assignment of dates. As stated above, despotic or imperial inscription is characterized by a need to deliver the spoken word of the despot in written form and it does so in the medium of the decree. Though there is not an identical match in the text of *Dhalgren*, the closest analogue to the imperial decree is Calkins' newspaper.

Calkins is a despotic character insofar as his words are followed closely by his readers and insofar as he wields power by virtue of being the sole official disseminator of knowledge within the city through his newspaper and the press which publishes Kid's poetry. Furthermore his absence from much of the narrative is also indicative of his despotic nature. That is, although he is alluded to as a central figure of the city's power structure and although he is supposedly eager to meet Kid, it is not until the novel's closing pages that he makes an actual appearance in the narrative. Due to the paranoid nature of the despot, determining "who is able to touch the full body of the sovereign" is a matter of caste and privilege, which Kid earns by virtue of his celebrity as a poet.[36] It is significant that the two meet at the monastery, itself an often-alluded-to but notably absent figure which is unreachable for the average resident of the city. The significance of meeting is that the monastery was established by Calkins and is host to an ill-defined monastic order: as Deleuze and Guattari explain, the despot must have a state religion and it is clear that Calkins has his.[37] The content of Calkins and Kid's conversation further illustrates Calkins' despotic nature insofar as he reveals that his seclusion at the monastery is due to his desire to learn how to better rule the city.

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[36] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 199.

[37] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 744; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 193.

Despotic inscription is concerned with transmitting the despot's speech in the form of writing, an operation which Deleuze and Guattari term signification. Signification is the process whereby writing and speech become dependent on each other insofar as the written decree must be translated from the language of the despot by the priest into the language spoken by the conquered subjects. The binding of speech to writing necessitates a level of abstraction, which in turn implies that what is transmitted has lost some of its specificity. Kid, as a poet, is aware of this slippage in meaning and expresses his frustrations about writing several times throughout the novel. Relatively early, when he has just begun his attempts at poetry, he asks "What have I set myself to fix in this dirty notebook that is not mine? […] though it cannot be done with words, it might be accomplished in some lingual gap […]"[38] The lingual gap to which Kid refers is the gap between speech and writing which imperial signification crushes when it binds the two together. Later in the novel he reflects on his apparent inability to take down in writing what he wishes to express, saying "I do not know what stickum tacks words and tongue […] I can't write at it."[39] Kid is distinctly aware of the limitations which are inherent to signification in its despotic or imperial form, limitations which seemingly deprive a written product of some of the meaning which is still present in its precursor in speech or thought. Despite his misgivings about the abstraction of his written work from the material reality which it aims to represent, Kid is partially reassured by his readers of his ability to bind the two together.

In their outline of human society, Deleuze and Guattari posit savagery as the ancestral point from which despotism and capitalism are evolved. The three epochs are markedly different,

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[38] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 156.

[39] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 514.

as we have seen with the comparison of capitalism's cynicism and meaningless or decoded representation and despotism's regime of terror and overcoded representation. By Deleuze and Guattari's account, these two epochs are preceded by what they define as savagery; however in *Dhalgren* and the city of Bellona it appears that savagery has returned to the position of cultural dominant. Prior to turning to the text of *Dhalgren*, key elements of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of savagery and territorial inscription will be explained which will enable an understanding of the city of Bellona as a savage territory. By examining the celebrity of Kid's writing among the residents of Bellona, it becomes clear that although some aspects of capitalist and despotic representation are still active, there is a clear reemergence or rediscovery of savage expression in the city. The evidence of this expression does not come from a reading of Kid's poetry, to which the reader is never directly exposed, but instead is supplied by analyzing the apparent celebrity of Kid and comments made by others about his work.

Despotism and despotic overcoding supersede savage or territorial inscription by binding the spoken and written word to each other, and by subordinating the transmission of writing to the speech of the absent despot. The elements of speech, writing, and the voice of the absent despot form despotism's triangle of inscription. Prior to the rise of the imperial state and its regime of inscription, which is not bound to a particular locale or population, savagery and territorial representation held the position of cultural dominant. Whereas imperial inscription is grounded in absence and abstraction, territorial inscription instead relies on co-presence and concreteness as the grounding principles which relate the spoken to the written. While despotism relies on a widespread terror or fear of the power of the despot, savagery instead operates on a system of cruelty which directly inscribes the body. Savage inscription occurs during rituals of

alliance and is performed directly on the human body. In the ritual, the stomach or womb of a young woman is marked as a procreative organ collectively invested in by the tribe. Whereas despotic inscription makes its elements dependent on each other, savage inscription instead "implies the triple independence of the articulated voice [of the woman expressing pain], the graphic hand [which has marked her, causing the pain], and the appreciative eye [which derives from the woman's pain a surplus value of code]."[40] Whereas imperial inscription renders writing transmittable over great distances by virtue of its abstraction of the written from the spoken, savage inscription maintains a necessary relationship between the voice and the mark which transcribes it.[41]

Within savage society and inscription what is crucial is the collective nature in which surplus value may be enjoyed. Collective enjoyment within savagery is intended as a means of staving off private or individual accumulation, which is proper in part to despotism and more fully to capitalism.[42] Direct enjoyment or individual enjoyment is thwarted in the example of the priest's evaluation of the ritual marking of women but it is more explicitly illustrated in Deleuze and Guattari's example of the nomad hunter. The nomad hunter, as described by the authors, is he who exists and camps within nomadic space which is not subordinated to the principles of social production. As the authors explain, however, the hunter is never a "pure nomad [as] there is always and already an encampment […] where it is a matter of inscribing and allocating, of marrying, and of feeding oneself." It is this larger encampment or village to which the hunter necessari-

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[40] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 188-91

[41] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 188-191, 204-5

[42] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 150,

ly returns so that he can participate in social production via marriage and other activities. By virtue of his role as provider, the hunter must return to this village with what he has caught but which he is not allowed to directly consume himself. The spoils of the hunt cannot be directly enjoyed and instead are transmitted back to the tribe for collective distribution. Just as much as the distribution of a surplus value of code in the priest-woman-village triangulation was shown to be collective, so too is the coding and enjoyment of flows of nourishment in the instance of the hunter-catch-village.[43]

The parallels of these elements of savage society to that of *Dhalgren* are most explicit in the nature and reception of Kid's poetry. As we have seen in the discussion of Kid's own attitude towards his work and the written word in general, it is clear that he is prevented from recognizing his poetry as something which truly captures his experience within Bellona. In this formulation, the relationship between Kid and his poetry is analogous to that between the priest and his extraction of a surplus value of code from the marking of a woman and that between the nomad hunter and the detachment of nourishing flow embodied in his kill. Despite Kid's lack of confidence in language and his poetry, there are attestations to its value from other characters which allow a reading of it as expressing some truth which is only expressible and legible within Bellona. That the value of his work is isolated or at the very least necessarily tied to its grounding in the context of Bellona is expressed by Ernest Newboy, a world-renowned poet visiting the city, who tells Kid that his "poems wrap themselves around and within this city."[44] What Newboy expresses is that Kid's work somehow penetrates, in both a material and figurative way, to the core

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[43] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 148.

[44] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 354.

truth of experience in Bellona and renders that truth in a manner which can only make sense to those within the city. That is, although money remains as a decoded vehicle of exchange and although time and the power of Calkins remain as overcoded vestiges of despotic power, Kid's poetry returns to the code proper to savage society. Newboy is not the only reader to extoll the virtues of Kid's work. In the second half of the novel, his book of poetry has been published and so well received that Calkins throws Kid a party at his estate to celebrate the success of the collection. One of the guests, a woman named Thelma informs Kid of his poems that she "really enjoyed them. And outside a few polite phrases, there just isn't the vocabulary to describe that sort of enjoyment in a way that sounds real. And your poems are one of the realest things that's happened to me in a long time."[45] The value of Kid's poetry to Thelma, or the value which she is able to express, is its ability to render her experience of Bellona in the written word. This reaction is markedly different from the general reaction to the only other publication within Bellona's border, Calkins' paper. Newboy, in conversation with Kid, explains that he has "received that holy and spectacular wound which bleeds… well, poetry."[46]

Though these preceding comments have demonstrated the degree to which Kid's poetry is intelligible only under the regime of savage inscription, it must also be reiterated that Bellona is also characterized by elements of despotism and capitalism. In the discussion of Oedipal nuclear family life, it was clear that some semblance of this capitalist social and familial institution is still present in Bellona. Similarly, the figure of Calkins and his newspaper is evidence of Bellona's continued subjection to a despotic regime. Although Kid's poetry is evidence of a reemer-

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[45] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 604.

[46] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 258.

gence of savage coding, the other symbols in the novel which seem to be invested with coded meaning are revealed to be utterly decoded and meaningless.

Narrative Alchemy: *Dhalgren's* Virtual Form

In scholarly and popular reviews of *Dhalgren*, commentators often draw comparisons to Thomas Pynchon's 1973 novel *Gravity's Rainbow*. The justification for this comparison relies on the two books' length, stylistic experimentation, and their attempts to frustrate readers' expectations and ease of comprehension. Though these are certainly valid points, the relationship between the two is ultimately more complex. The difference between the two is expressed by Samuel Delany himself:

> *Gravity's Rainbow* is a fantasy about a war most of its readers don't really remember, whereas *Dhalgren* is in fairly pointed dialogue with all the depressed and burned-out areas of America's great cities […] To see what *Dhalgren* is all about, you only have to walk along a mile of your own town's inner city.[47]

Where Delany is primarily concerned with the content of the two novels, it is also necessary to compare their form to fully demonstrate their difference. This is because, as scholar W. Gilbert Adair notes, *Dhalgren* encourages a paranoid reading not only through symbolic content but also via a narrative founded on omission of information or formal distortion.[48]

Dhalgren's deployment of paranoia at the level of content is founded on the proliferation of symbols. Many of these symbols occur with relative frequency throughout the narrative, and in accordance with standard reading practice the reader expects that their meaning will ultimately be revealed. Kid's reaction to many of these symbols, such as his intense fear of characters wear-

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[47] Delany, "The Semiology of Silence," 37.

[48] Adair, *The American Epic Novel in the Late Twentieth Century*, 187.

ing red-tinted sunglasses, primes the reader to expect a dramatic revelation of the hidden meaning behind the many oddities which the novel presents as symbols of great value. Other examples of these symbols include orchids, which are bladed weapons worn by the Scorpion gang, and optic chains which are composed of prisms, mirrors and lenses, and are worn by Kid and several other characters. However in a major scene of the novel Kid and his friend Tak enter a warehouse of the Maitland Systems Engineering corporation and find boxes of these objects on the warehouse's shelves, thus revealing them as mere commodities for sale on the market: the objects are kitschy trinkets, *not* portents of some hidden and profound truth. These aspects of the novel operate as content, rather than as formal omissions, because they are primarily of symbolic value.

Whereas the paranoid content of *Dhalgren* is constituted through the proliferation of symbols, its paranoid form is achieved through a narrative structure which purposefully omits or distorts events and narrative transitions which the reader has been primed to expect such that the nonlinearity of the narrative would be resolved. The primary example is Kid's name, which at the beginning of the novel is given central importance to the narrative but which soon diminishes as a key plot-point. Eventually Kid's name is revealed; however this comes at the end of the novel and does not serve as an inciting incident for major plot developments other than to signal that the narrative must end as its central mystery has been solved. Kid's name, that is, serves as an alkahest which dissolves the narrative tension of its absence from the text. The second-most important missing piece, in terms of motivating the novel's narrative, is the cause of Bellona's apocalyptic collapse. Although several events, ranging from race riots to an environmental disaster, are hinted at as the root cause, neither are definitively identified as the root of Bellona's

demise. Finally, Kid's poetry is a major example of the novel's exclusion of key information insofar as great detail is provided about the poetry's beauty and effect on its readers despite the actual text of the poetry never being presented for the reader's evaluation.

Gravity's Rainbow, however, is a book about paranoia: it has paranoia solely as its content rather than its formal logic. What this formal difference indicates is also a different relationship to the world in which the reader is situated.[49] *Gravity's Rainbow* relies on an interior-text and exterior-world binary which *Dhalgren* problematizes. This can be formulated as a difference between metaphor and metonymy, insofar as *Gravity's Rainbow* is a metaphorical representation of the world and *Dhalgren* is a metonymic reference to the world.[50] *Dhalgren's* metonymic nature is best demonstrated in the manner which Delany relates its elements and their relationship to the material world. The differences between these two modes are their claims to capture the world within the text: metaphorical representation is founded on this claim, while metonymic reference is not. The difference between the two text's relationship to the world is also mirrored in their relationship to the reader, which I alluded to as the problematization of a binary relationship. Inasmuch as *Gravity's Rainbow* relies on a strict text-world binary, it also relies on a strict text-reader binary because its formal logic places the reader outside in the world. *Dhalgren*, in its problematization of the text-world relationship, additionally destabilizes that of text-reader. This

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[49] For the purpose of brevity, I will use the term "world" to refer only to the material conditions of a reader's existence. "Text" will be used to refer to events within the novel. Though I argue against, following Ross Chambers, a strict exclusive binary of reader-text, it is to an extent necessary in the early stages of the argument and will be problematized as the argument develops.

[50] Eugene Holland, *Baudelaire and Schizoanalysis: The Socio-Poetics of Modernism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 30-9. The crucial difference is that metaphor imposes and relies on a similarity of terms whereas metonymy instead relies on a contiguity of heterogeneous terms.
Lacan also provides significant insight, in "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason since Freud."

is first indicated in *Dhalgren*'s epigraph, which reads: "You have confused the true and the real."[51] The binary becomes a trinity, in this formulation, of: reader-"you," text-"true," and world-"real." Because he relates these three elements via "confusion," Delany renders them unstable and to an extent indistinguishable from one another, and in so doing sets the conditions for their becoming-imperceptible.

Prior to defining the imperceptibility of the reader-text-world, I wish to present Deleuze and Guattari's definition of imperceptibility as a process of subjectivity in which the subject's speed of becoming renders them imperceptible or unrecognizable over long durations. Deleuze and Guattari do not ascribe "imperceptibility" to individual subjects, and instead opt for the term "impersonality" when referring to individuals who "have left subjectivity or personality in order to assume one's haecceity or event-character."[52] Impersonality would superficially seem a better choice of words to describe Kid's becoming, because he is an individual. If one considers him instead as a formal-inciting element, then he is more properly referred to as imperceptible than impersonal.[53] The difficulty of drawing a boundary between Kid as a formal-inciting element and Kid as simply a part of the novel's content is characteristic of *Dhalgren*'s difficulty but also of

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[51] Delany, *Dhalgren*, viii.

[52] Mark Bonta and John Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 98.

[53] More demanding readers of Deleuze and Guattari might reject my argument because the authors themselves reject describing a subject as a haecceity, for which imperceptibility is the corresponding virtue. It is for this reason that I must emphasize Kid as a formal element, because by reading him as such his "relations of movement" and "capacit[y] to affect and be affected" become apparent (*A Thousand Plateaus,* 261). These latter aspects will be explained in terms of the anomalous, rather than as impersonal. I apologize in advance for the difficulty this might pose for a reader: *Dhalgren* and *A Thousand Plateaus* are formidable texts, and the explication of both is in turn difficult.

the nuance with which Deleuze and Guattari crafted the "three virtues" of imperceptibility-indiscernibility-impersonality. On imperceptibility and becoming, D&G write:

> It is because we no longer have anything to hide that we can no longer be apprehended. To become imperceptible oneself, to have dismantled love in order to become capable of loving. To have dismantled one's self in order finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line. A clandestine passenger on a motionless voyage. To become like everybody else; but this, precisely, is a becoming only for one who knows how to be nobody, to no longer be anybody. To paint oneself as gray on gray.[54]

The question one must ask is: Is Kid a recognizable as a somebody, or imperceptible as a nobody? To make a cursory attempt at answering this question, we can say that in D&G's configuration, a "somebody" is loosely analogous to the definition of metaphor provided above. Being somebody indicates a relative degree of stability in a given subject, such that it is recognizable and distinguishable over a duration, and can be represented or captured. Becoming nobody implies the converse: a speed of becoming in which the subject undergoes qualitative changes and transformations of state quickly, such that it becomes unrecognizable and indistinct over a duration.[55] Kid, as an imperceptible subject, embodies such a transformation of subjectivity and experience.

Readers of *Dhalgren* will likely argue that Kid is in fact a somebody, not a nobody. This is understandable for several reasons. The first objection would be that, though Kid's proper

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[54] Deleuze and Guattari, "1874: Three Novellas, or 'What Happened?'," 197. My break with Chicago Style for citations from *A Thousand Plateaus* is not without reason. Deleuze and Guattari themselves offer *AtP* as a book which can be read in any order, in parts rather than as a whole. While their is consistency and overlap in their arguments from chapter to chapter, the content of each chapter varies widely. To give readers a more immediate sense of how I am using Deleuze and Guattari's concepts, I offer the chapter title rather than simple a page-number to point readers to the specific context from which I am drawing on Deleuze and Guattari. All citations from *A Thousand Plateaus* are from the 1987 edition of the book translated by Brian Massumi and published by University of Minnesota Press.

[55] Deleuze and Guattari, "1227: Treatise on Nomadology:- The War Machine," 371-2, 382.

name is not initially known either to him or the reader, he is known as "Kid" and is therefore identifiable as somebody. What is crucial here is not the degree to which we can know Kid via this designation; rather it is that he lacks a name and becomes knowable only by the application of his pseudonym. What is additionally crucial to note is the instability of the pseudonym itself: it is given variably as kid, Kid, Kidd, or the Kid. Aside from his designation as "Kid," other potential points of capture arise in his eventual fame as a poet and the leader of a Scorpion nest. His status as an esteemed poet of Bellona's literati crowd would seem also to indicate Kid's status as a somebody. This is not the case, however, insofar as Kid states "I don't think I'm a poet… anymore, Mr. Calkins. I'm not sure I ever was one."[56] What this indicates is that, even though Kid is celebrated as a poet, he has already surpassed or moved on from this status and has evaded capture in it due in part to the fact that soon after sending in the galleys of his work he takes the role as the head of a Scorpion nest.

Kid's role as leader of the Scorpions is perhaps the most problematic for my argument, because this role superficially indicates a degree of privilege held by Kid over others. To correct this initial presumption, it is necessary to consider the Scorpions as a multiplicity or a rhizome, which D&G tell us "cannot increase or diminish without *their elements changing in nature*."[57] Once one member leaves or enters, the nest takes on a new state irreducible to that which preceded the addition or subtraction of a new member. Within a multiplicity, such as the nest, no element is privileged over another: instead of a position of privilege, Kid can be said to occupy the position of the anomalous, that which "carries the transformations of becoming or crossings

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[56] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 741.

[57] Deleuze and Guattari, "1914: One or Several Wolves?," 30-1, emphasis in original.

of multiplicities always farther down the line of flight."[58] Although the members and relationships between the members of the nest are always changing, Kid remains as the peripheral and anomalous element which serves as the engine of change and becoming in the narrative at large. It is not that Kid's importance is as an ordering or overcoding element: in fact D&G warn against ascribing order to the process of transformation catalyzed by the anomalous. They additionally warn against considering the anomalous as an individual and for this reason, Kid's characterization as the anomalous must be understood in the transformations he engenders in not only the nest but the entirety of Bellona.

There is a connection between the state-changes of the Scorpion nest, the state of Bellona more broadly, and the appeal of Kid's writing: both are expressions of what D&G term the "minor." The Scorpion nest, as we have seen, is a multiplicity without authority. Similarly, in the terms of the minor, it is without an order-word which would act as "a word or phrase constituting a command and a word or phrase creative of order."[59] A minor treatment of language is defined by setting its elements in flight and constant variation instead of order and stasis, is founded on the pass-word rather than the order-word.[60] "Pass" here is defined in terms of passage, not necessarily by the secrecy of the word itself.[61] Although no explicit "password" is used within Scorpion nests, the closest analogue of such a word would be the variety of code-names which the

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[58] Deleuze and Guattari, "1773: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible" 249.

[59] Deleuze and Guattari, "November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics," 76-9, 523 note 1.

[60] Deleuze and Guattari, "Postulates," 107-110.

[61] Passage here meaning the intensive speed of the Scorpion nest's state-changes. Passage here is used in the same sense in which D&G define the nomad as "he who does not move." (381). Passage is, then, not movement- which D&G oppose to speed- it is a state-change. Additionally, I use the term "pass-word" in a nonlinguistic sense and instead opt for it to link the Scorpions with the minor.

Scorpions adopt for themselves. Although the rest of Bellona's citizens simply go by their birth-names, initiation into the Scorpion lifestyle seems to go hand in hand with the adoption of a new and non-familial name.

Having considered the internal dynamics of the novel at some length, we can now turn to those which more directly implicate the reader in the formal logic of *Dhalgren*. The structural forms we must consider are the Möbius strip, the line, and the missing piece. The novel can be conceived of as a Möbius strip which begins with Kid's namelessness and entry into Bellona, and which "flips" roughly halfway through, and which ends with his exit and recognition of his name.[62] Kid's line of flight through this structure is one of such speed that designations such as poet, Scorpion, or his proper name do not capture him or prevent his escape from Bellona. The "flip" in terms of the novel's content is most apparent in many of the mysterious items encountered throughout, such as the red eye lenses, the optic chains worn by Kid and many others, the light-shields which shroud the Scorpions in holographic animals, as well as the orchids used by the Scorpions as weapons. For much of the first half of the novel, these are figured as mysterious totems needing to be deciphered. But ultimately they are revealed to simply be commodities, when Kid and Tak visit a warehouse and find them all on shelves waiting to be transported for sale. In thwarting the reader's desire for some profound meaning behind the items, Delany "flips" the mystery behind them on its head. The Möbius strip's confusion of inside and outside is further illustrated in considering the reader's line of flight.

The reader's line of flight runs parallel to Kid's for much of the novel, but is divergent in two pairs of crucial points. The first of these pairs is the beginning and ending of the novel: the

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[62] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 1, 388, 778, 801.

reader comes to function as the third element of the text-world-reader relationship described above, whereas Kid is simply a component of one of these terms (the text). That is, although we must resist the strict binarization of interior and exterior, Kid is ultimately located in the interior of the text whereas the reader seems to be ultimately located in the exterior of the world. This is illustrated in the second pair of divergences, which involves two encounters Kid has with mirrors. The first is during a Scorpion-run on the Emboriky's department store. Kid glances in a mirror and at first believes that the reflection corresponds to his own appearance. On closer examination, however, he realizes that the reflection is "taller and stockier" and empty-handed even though Kid is wearing the bladed weapon known as an orchid. Furthermore, the reflection's face expresses emotion independent of Kid's facial expressions. The second mirror incident occurs when Kid reads his notebook, which is of uncertain authorship, and finds that someone has written:

> I am interested in the arts of incident only so far as fiction touches life […] at the level of the most crystalline correspondence. Consider: If an author, passing a mirror, were to see one day not himself but some character of his invention, though he might be surprised, might even question his sanity, he would still have something by which to relate. But suppose, passing on the inside, the character should glance at his mirror and see, not himself, but the author, a complete stranger, staring at him, to whom he has no relation at all, what is this poor creature left…?

Here Delany provides the explanation of Kid seeing a strange reflection in the mirror at Emboriky's: it is not himself he sees, but rather Delany. The divergence of the reader from Kid, in this sense, is a convergence of the reader with Delany insofar as both are situated in the world. The reflection of the world into the text via the visuals of a mirror is an illustration of the novel's

epigraph, that is, the confusion of the true and the real. By directly implicating the world into the text as a reflection, Delany confuses the reader's assumption of their discreteness.[63]

The question of "missing pieces" is one which complicates matters even more: I have spent considerable time discussing the formal logic of the novel and its relation to both the reader and the world, which makes it seem as if this logic can be definitively totalized into a cohesive whole, thereby solving the many mysteries of the narrative. But *Dhalgren* is a novel of mysteries without solutions, and indeed Delany himself expresses this: "A number of things in *Dhalgren* are just meant to function as mysteries. They're mysteries when the book begins, and they're mysteries when the book ends."[64] In the terms of Deleuze and Guattari, then, *Dhalgren* is an example of the rhizome-book: the structure of the novel is "n-1."[65] By grounding the narrative structure in a fundamental incompleteness, Delany purposefully excludes the "1" in D&G's equation which would make the novel a totalized and resolved whole. What this indicates is that, aside from confusion, the relationship of reader-text-world is determined by tension. To demonstrate this, I will examine several of the major missing pieces of the novel.

The first missing piece is Kid's proper name, which is the most basic mystery and underlying source of tension for the duration of the novel. Kid searches through his memory for it, hoping to remember by recalling instances in which someone would have called out to him by

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[63] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 337-8, 360.
An additional example of this kind of implication is the ending of Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, which reads:"Say make me, remake me. You are free to do it and I am free to let you because look, look. *Look where your hands are. Now."* These lines compel the reader to divert attention from the text to the world (their hands), thus confusing the practice of reading which draws focus solely to the text (content). Morrison, *Jazz*, 229.

[64] Robinson, "Samuel Delany," *A.V. Club*, http://www.avclub.com/article/samuel-r-delany-13725

[65] Deleuze and Guattari, "Introduction: Rhizome," 11, 24.

name. The lack of a proper name is his most pressing concern prior to his designation as Kid, but after being given this nickname his focus turns to exploring Bellona and writing his poetry. Various other mysteries such as the cause of Bellona's apocalypse, which is never revealed, come to the fore as Kid's concern for his name loses its urgency. When Kid finally does recall his name, this event is presented as almost inconsequential in terms of granting him a more complete sense of self. The revelation of Kid's proper name, rather than giving him a complete sense of identity, instead resolves the narrative tension of its absence and thereby precipitates his flight from the city.

The episode in which Lanya involves Kid and Denny in helping her record a composition, which she names "Diffraction," serves as a counter-example to the notion of the missing piece and the formal instability proper to *Dhalgren*. The process of recording involves recording several tracks of harmonica, clapping, and vocals for the effect of a single track which sounds as if it is being performed by a roomful of people. The tension here is one of many pieces which must be layered to fit together, thereby resolving the tension caused by each individual piece's incomprehensibility. This is markedly different from the unresolved absence of Kid's poetry, to which the reader is never exposed directly. That is, Lanya's song is a resolved piece composed of diffracted components which must be assembled through numerous stages of tracking. By introducing all of the missing pieces into one coherent whole, she resolves the process of composition, thereby ending this process. A song recorded on tape is identically repeatable and will be the same to the listener on each repetition, whereas a single reading of *Dhalgren* requires the reader to shift their perspective and expectations. *Dhalgren* is in a single reading, let alone multiple re-readings, non-identically repeatable and different on each (re)read.

Kid's poetry is the final, and most perplexing, missing piece. When asked what his intention in writing poetry is, Kid responds:

> I'm trying to […] construct a complicitous illusion in lingual catalysis, a crystalline and conscientious alkahest […] You listen to that too carefully and you'll figure out what it means. Then the words will die on you and you won't understand anymore.[66]

This is a curiously esoteric pronouncement which seems to summarize *Dhalgren* as a whole. Catalysis in general refers to chemical reactions intensified by the addition of a catalyst. While catalysis can be used to synthesize a product, in this instance that is not the case. Kid explains that the catalyst is an alkahest, which is an alchemical term referring to the universal solvent which transmutes all substances.[67] Insofar as the novel is a linguistic-catalytic process, the introduction of the alkahest in the form of Kid's poetry or his name would dissolve their mystery and thereby resolve the motivating tensions of the narrative, which would in turn result in its end. One might object that because we are not exposed to the text of Kid's poetry, we cannot know how successful he is at achieving his goal. However, one of his readers explains that his poetry is "one of the realest things that's happened to [her] in a long time," indicating the success Kid finds in terms of "constructing a complicit illusion in lingual catalysis."[68] That is, his success is illustrated by his readers' recognition of his work as "real" insofar as it somehow expresses their experience within Bellona. His ability is furthermore illustrated in the second part of his explanation, where he states that the realization of its meaning will ultimately result in the forgetting of

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[66] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 640.

[67] Jung, "Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy," in *Dreams*, 137-141.
Eirenaeus Philalethes, "The Secret of the Immortal Liquor called Alkahest or Ignis-Aqua."

[68] Delany, *Dhalgren,* 604-5.

this meaning. Insofar as meaning is a missing piece, its realization resolves or ends the need to search for it.

The preceding discussion of missing pieces illustrates the rhizomatic construction of *Dhalgren's* narrative and formal logic. It is non-totalizable and irreducible to a transcendent unity because it is founded on the *n-1*. This is not to say, however, that there is no unity or coherence within the narrative. Instead, it is necessary to define this coherence as either actual or virtual. In the case of the novel's coherence being actual, it would mean that all of its components add up to a whole, to the effect that its lines are already rigidly traced and therefore not mysterious. To consider its coherence as virtual, "real without being actual," however allows us to account for the ability to comprehend the narrative while also maintaining a degree of mystery. To consider the novel's coherence as actual would be to choose one ordered line through the plot for the purpose of comprehension, and to exclude all other possible readings as inconsistent with the "proper" reading. To read the novel "virtually" is to be able to choose multiple readings as simultaneously coherent, without selecting one reading as "proper" or "true." Furthermore a virtual reading of the novel accepts the unexpected coherence of the narrative, in spite of the nonlinearity of reading it. This is evocative of Deleuze's comments on destiny and freedom in *Difference and Repetition*: "we always say of successive presents which express a destiny that they always play out the same thing, the same story, but at different levels […] freedom lies in choosing the levels."[69] *Dhalgren* allows the reader total freedom because the reader is able to choose the lines, or levels in Deleuze's terminology, which play out the "destiny" or plot of the narrative.

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[69] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), 83.

This is illustrated precisely in the proliferation of missing pieces, which cannot be known directly due to their absence, and which can instead be understood only in their effects. Though we never read the text of Kid's poetry, we are told via narration that he is writing it and via dialogue of its effect on its readers. The absence of the poetry imbues in the narrative a degree of virtuality insofar as the poetry is real in its effects on its readers and the developments of the plot, but it is not actual insofar as it never materializes in the text. In *Dhalgren*, the virtual nature of its narrative and formal logic undergird the relationship of confusion between its reader, its text, and the world in which the preceding two elements are situated.

Dhalgren constructs a plot-line of great speed and intensity. Solving its mysteries and organizing its elements into a coherent whole for the purpose of comprehension is quickly revealed as an illusory or fool-hardy endeavor due to the fact that, by rendering these elements as fixed and static tracing of a narrative, one ignores the coextensive and simultaneously possible readings of the novel. This realization compels us to return to the question of the becoming-imperceptible of the reader-text-world first raised at the beginning of this essay. The imperceptibility of the type of subjectivity embodied by Kid was explained as a function of his line's speed: no categorization or naming could render him as a fixed entity. The revelation of his name necessitates that he leave Bellona in flight so that he would not be captured, rendered perceptible, when he discovers that his name is "Michael Henry F—." In fleeing Bellona, Kid enables himself "to be nobody, to no longer be anybody."

The Möbius strip-like path that the narrative follows demonstrates the becoming-imperceptible of the reader and world with the text, as well. The reader's line, following Kid's, moves from the world into the text. The reader's line is flipped, like the edges of the Möbius strip, when

it is reflected back into the world along with Delany's reflection in the Emboriky's mirror. Kid's line is flipped following the ending of his time as a working poet and beginning his time as a Scorpion.[70] *Dhalgren* itself forms a Möbius strip-like-loop insofar as its beginning and ending circle around to each other. Ultimately, it might be said that the relationship of text-world-reader is bound together by the optic chain worn by Kid and several other characters throughout the novel. This chain is composed of a prism-world, in which components are diffracted and irreducible to each other; a mirror-text, which metonymically reflects the world; and a lens-reader, which refracts the elements of the narrative so that they can be deciphered. By relating the reader-text-world via confusion, and thereby rendering them imperceptible and indistinct from one another, Delany has "construct[ed] a complicitous illusion in lingual catalysis, a crystalline and conscientious alkahest": *Dhalgren*.

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[70] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 388.

Conclusion:
Dhalgren and Schizonomadism

Samuel R. Delany's *Dhalgren* is, as William Gibson argues, a singularity. The novel is clearly marked by history and the product of the eruptive play of forces proper to the 1960s, but ultimately exceeds any labels, such as "science fiction" or "high literature," which might be applied to it. Although Delany does deploy clear historical markers resembling countercultural figures as well as stylistic decisions which characterize the novel as postmodernist, *Dhalgren*'s relationship to history is ultimately more complex than a mere reflection. The various social groups and factions of the 1960s were at each others' throats or in accord with one another, and the same can be said of the groups of characters which populate Bellona. Ultimately these groups, as they existed in the real world and as they are represented in *Dhalgren*, are more different than similar. The first distinction is that real-world expectations about how various identity-markers structure experience cannot necessarily be counted on as valid in the context of Bellona.[71] Another crucial difference is the degree to which these real-world groups strove for progress, however they defined it, whereas *Dhalgren* seems to eschew any such effort. Although there are politically and philosophically charged discussions between characters, these discussions ultimately do not coalesce into a unified argument. Delany is a notoriously careful writer and it is for this reason that the esoteric nature of *Dhalgren*'s political-historical implications must be understood as a deliberate decision, rather than as a failure or unwillingness to take such an explicit stance.

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[71] Mark Jerng, "A World of Difference: Samuel Delany's Dhalgren and the Protocols of Racial Reading," *American Literature*, Vol. 83 No. 2 (June 2011).

Delany's refusal to make *Dhalgren*'s political or historical implications explicit is in part what makes the novel so mysterious. The craft with which Delany hides these aspects of the novel necessitate consistent and conscientious, and perhaps numerous, readings of the novel. *Dhalgren*'s nonlinearity ensures that each reading of the novel will be utterly different, even for the same reader. This is problematic for deciding upon the historical import of the novel insofar as each reading foregrounds different aspects of the situation to which Delany was responding. Furthermore, with each reading the reader becomes more comfortable with the text and is able to spend less time simply tracking the narrative and more time deconstructing it. Having read the novel three times, I can say that each time reading it was a markedly different experience and consequently different aspects of the text were the most salient throughout my engagement with it. In my first reading I paid most attention not only to the plot itself but also to the characters' discussions of race and sexuality. In my second reading I began looking for the tropes and truths which persisted throughout the entirety of the narrative. Finally on my third reading I subjected the text to analysis under the theoretical framework set forth by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volumes. Providing this information might have been done, more traditionally, in the introduction to this work rather than in its conclusion. However by now it is hopefully clear to the reader that *Dhalgren* is a work which defies tradition insofar as it rejects Oedipalized desire and the rigid distinction between its reader, its text, and the world with which it engages. Any fault or lack of clarity in the argument is therefore my own; despite the difficulty of their texts, Delany, Deleuze and Guattari are in fact quite coherent.

Deleuze and Guattari are, for their parts, more explicit than Delany in taking a stance. *Anti-Oedipus*, written roughly between the same dates as *Dhalgren* (1969-1973), is a sustained

critique of Freudian psychoanalysis and this framework's starting point of neurosis and the Oedipalized private individual. Deleuze and Guattari instead develop schizoanalysis from the starting point of psychosis-schizophrenia and take as their object of critique not only Oedipalized subjects but the social, historical, and economic conditions of global capitalism which construct such a subject. Rejecting capitalist abstraction and despotic terror, Deleuze and Guattari instead signal towards a post-capitalist New Earth in which improvisational meaning and joy are the order of the day. *Anti-Oedipus*, like *Dhalgren*, is very much a product of the 1960s insofar as its tone is bold and its content seems to reject every norm of Western civilization. Deleuze and Guattari's 1980 volume *A Thousand Plateaus* is a much more cautious and reserved analysis of contemporary and historical conditions than its predecessor. Additionally it is far more eclectic in its source-material and borrows equally from the human and natural sciences, whereas *Anti-Oedipus* mainly draws on the human sciences of psychoanalysis and ethnology. Despite varied sources between the two volumes there is certainly a degree of a unified concern for escape from overdetermined societal norms and for dynamic becoming rather than static being.[72]

Whereas *Anti-Oedipus* joyfully endorses the breakthroughs in meaning-production portrayed by the figure of the schizo, *A Thousand Plateaus* instead develops the historical and conceptual figure of the nomad. Furthermore the desiring-machine of the first volume is transformed into a war-machine in the second. Schizophrenia and nomadism can be, and often are, treated as separate concepts; combined, however, these figures and machines develop into what I name as "schizonomadism." Schizophrenia, here, may be considered primarily as a regime of meaning-

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[72] In addition to the volumes themselves, for this summary of the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project I draw on François Dosse's biography of Deleuze and Guattari as well as Eugene Holland's monographs on the volumes.

production or a mode of perception-schematization. Nomadism, on the other hand, is a relationship to and exploitation of time and space which shares with schizophrenia a rejection of predetermined and static principles or precepts and instead opts for "an experimentation in contact with the real."[73]

The schizo and the nomad are both embodied in *Dhalgren*'s protagonist Kid. Kid's relationship to language and perception is shaped by a desire to break the limits of overdetermined speech and to bridge the "lingual gap" between the world and its linguistic representation.[74] Kid's relationship to time is similarly founded on rupture: "it is not that [he] has no past. Rather, it continually fragments on the terrible and vivid ephemera of now."[75] His relationship to space is nomadic because Bellona has rules, he just has "to find them out [by exploring the city]" and nomadic-territorial space "can 'be explored only by legwork.'"[76] The full meaning and implications of *Dhalgren* as a work of schizonomadism are yet to be articulated, but the preceding comments summarize the major lines along which this argument has been made in my research thus far and will be conducted in the future. Left to be considered is how the arguments developed here can be operationalized to respond to our current socio-historical context and shape the future, decades after the writing of *Dhalgren* and the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* volumes. I

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[73] Deleuze and Guattari, "Rhizome," 12.

[74] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 156.

[75] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 10. He also addresses his rupture with time on page 420, where he says "I had a mother, I had a father. Now I don't remember their names. I don't remember mine. In another room, two people are sleeping who are nearer to me by how many years and thousands of miles; for whom, in this terrifying light, I would almost admit love."

[76] Delany, *Dhalgren*, 87; Deleuze and Guattari, "Nomadology," 371.

will conclude, quoting Deleuze in one of his final texts, by saying that in going forward "there is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons."[77]

[77] Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," *October*, Vol. 59 (Winter, 1992), 4.

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